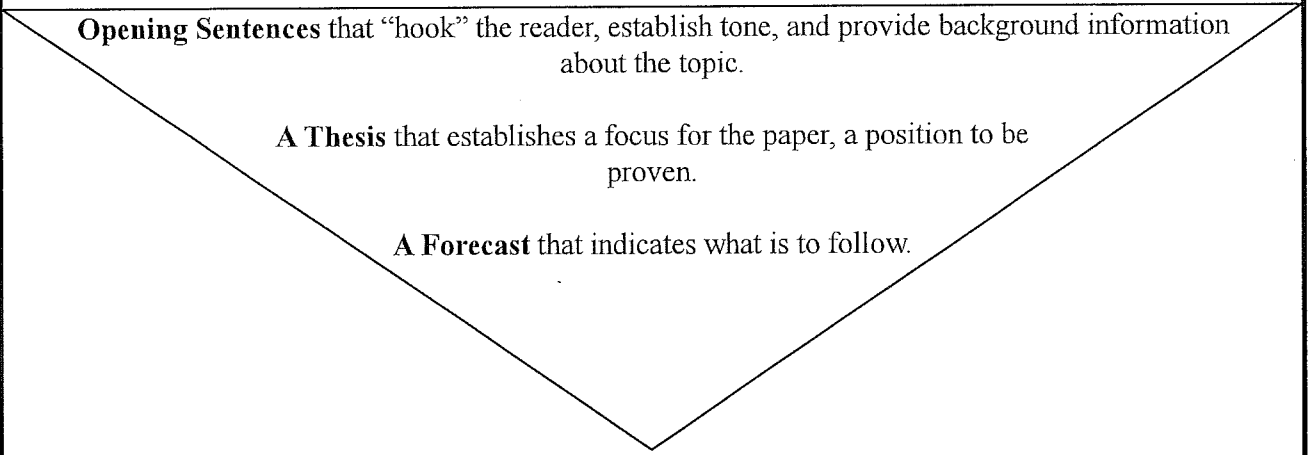


What Is an Introduction?

Whether a single paragraph—as some audiences will request—or more, an introduction has many purposes. It should:

- Capture the reader’s attention and keep it, through the use of interesting, unique, or creative words and ideas.
- Set a tone and communicate information that will help the reader understand the purpose of the paper.
- Provide general background information the reader may need in order to understand the thesis.
- Assert a thesis which provides focus and direction for readers.
- Indicate what is to follow in the body of the essay.

A common way to represent a typical introduction is through an upside down triangle, with the wide end of the triangle representing *general* information and the narrow end representing *specific* information:



Opening Sentences that “hook” the reader, establish tone, and provide background information about the topic.

A Thesis that establishes a focus for the paper, a position to be proven.

A Forecast that indicates what is to follow.

Opening Sentences

As revealed in the diagram above, opening sentences “hook” the reader, establish the tone, and provide background. Given this model, your first concern as a writer should be to capture the attention of your reader—to “hook” your reader into your paper and make him/her want to read it. For ideas about how to accomplish this, see Student Handout 4.11a (“Opening Sentence Techniques: Capturing a Reader’s Attention”).

In addition to capturing your reader’s attention, the opening sentences of your essay should set a tone and communicate information that will help your reader understand the purpose of the paper. To accomplish this, you might consider following your “hook” with information about the general topic and then narrowing the ideas toward your precise topic. For example:

- The opening sentences of an essay about the effects of a lightning-induced brush fire on a particular stretch of land might include the broad observation that nature produces cycles of destruction that lead to renewal.

- The opening sentences of an essay about the effects of Caesar Chavez's hunger strikes on the unionizing efforts of the United Farm Workers might include a statement about the power of individual actions to shape social change.
- The opening sentences of an autobiographical essay about how you came to appreciate your brother's humor might include a broad observation that we often misunderstand or misjudge people when we use, as a basis for our judgment, our reactions to their humor.
- The opening sentences of a biographical essay about a local artist might include an explanation of the role artists play in communities.

As you craft your introduction and work to include general topic information, remember that your reader will stay more engaged if you use interesting, unique, or creative ideas rather than clichés and generalizations. Essays that begin with phrases like, "Throughout history, there have been conflicts..." or "Science helps us understand the world..." or "According to Webster's Dictionary..." don't get much mileage toward developing a topic or capturing the reader's interest.

In addition to engaging your reader, the opening sentences should provide some detailed background information about the subject of the essay. Including this type of information provides a smooth, natural progression, or movement, from the general topic to your specific thesis. Using the same essay examples listed above, the following might be included as background information:

- Brush fire essay: background information might include facts about how many times the land has been burned and/or facts about the most recent burn.
- Caesar Chavez essay: background information might include how and why Caesar Chavez became involved with the United Farm Workers and undertook hunger strikes as a means of protest.
- Autobiographical essay: background information might include your brother's name and a few significant lines of a joke (or jokes) he told and your initial reactions of impatience and disgust.
- Biographical essay: background information might include the author's name and age and some enticing facts about how many shows she has had and which art pieces are prominently displayed in the community.

As the opening sentences lead toward your thesis, a common understanding should start to emerge between you and your reader. Your reader should have a sense of what you're trying to prove and how it is related to more general background information.

Thesis

A thesis statement is a clearly worded answer to a question and/or a clearly worded declaration of the view(s)/ideas you will substantiate, assert, or prove in your paper. It has a definite subject and an opinion. For example:

Thesis: Artist Dorothy Hahn has been a vital member of the Carlsbad community and has contributed to the intellectual and aesthetic well-being of its citizens.

Subject = Dorothy Hahn

Opinion = Has been a vital member of our community and has contributed to our well-being.

Often, audiences will anticipate a single sentence thesis, which will require you to use precise words to communicate your ideas, no matter how complex. Sometimes, you will be granted the liberty to expand intricate, complex thesis ideas into two or more sentences; doing so will enable you to more clearly state what you